Democratization and Research Methods

Democratization and Research Methods is a coherent survey and critique of both democratization research and the methodology of comparative politics. The two themes enhance each other: the democratization literature illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of various methodological approaches, and the critique of methods makes sense of the vast and bewildering democratization field. Michael Coppedge argues that each of the three main approaches in comparative politics – case studies and comparative histories, formal modeling, and large-sample statistical analysis – accomplishes one fundamental research goal relatively well, “thickness,” integration, and generalization, respectively, but the other two poorly. Chapters cover conceptualization and measurement, case studies and comparative histories, formal models and theories, political culture and survey research, and quantitative testing. The final chapter summarizes the state of knowledge about democratization and lays out an agenda for multimethod research.

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This book has been in gestation more than ten years – how much more, I cannot bear to calculate. In a sense, it began when I was a graduate student thirty years ago. I remember wanting to believe that the research I was reading was giving me real insights into comparative politics, but at the same time I had a nagging feeling that it rested on a shaky foundation that people were trying hard to ignore. I remember wondering, “How do we know what we think we know?” In subsequent years I undertook a long, slow journey through methodology and the philosophy of science to satisfy my own curiosity and eventually found the answers I sought. This is the book I wish I had had. I hope it will be useful to beginning graduate students who are now where I was then.

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